

1st Female to earn “Top Cadet”

Officer Kelly Bender



Officer Kelly Bender graduated on March 14, 2003 becoming the first female to receive the “Top Cadet” award.



Kelly traveled from Kansas to San Antonio in pursuit of education...of course she never thought that her journey would end up at the San Antonio Police Training Academy.

After deciding to make San Antonio her permanent home, the Texas A & M graduate pursued her career as a teacher at one of the local middle schools. Kelly states that while she enjoyed teaching she knew in her heart of hearts she could contribute much more to society. So, she decided to begin searching...her first step was pursuing a civilian position with the San Antonio Police Department working as an evidence technician.

Working as a technician allowed her to learn about a career in law enforcement. Kelly states, “After being in contact with numerous officers and observing them on the job, I saw how officers have a direct impact on citizens’ lives during times of crisis.” However, since no one in her family has had a career in law enforcement she knew she would have to convince her family that she was making the right career choice. Initially family members and friends expressed concern over her safety. However, once she began processing as an applicant her family and friends began to support her career decision and showed their support by attending the free “Citizen Police Academy” classes in order to understand and learn about her new career.

*Kelly states that her biggest challenge was “preparing for the rigorous physical training at the academy.” At this point she had already witnessed some of the training, based on her observations, she developed her own program which included running and weight training. In return, her preparation not only helped her endure the physical challenges but upon graduating from the San Antonio Police Training Academy (March 14, 2003) Kelly made history by becoming the **first female** to earn the highest honor bestowed upon a cadet, “**Top Cadet**”. According to the San Antonio Express-News, Kelly “rose to the top of what instructors described as the most impressive class of cadets in about a decade.”*

So what does she think about her new career? Kelly responds, “Being new to patrol, I’m still learning to apply the training I received in the academy to real-life situations. I receive tremendous support from my fellow officers and I continue to learn from experienced veterans.” Where are the rewards? Kelly says, “I handled a call recently during which the persons involved thanked me for my help. This doesn’t happen often, but when citizens express their gratitude to me for the way I handle their particular situation, I feel I’ve accomplished something.”